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OUR IMMIGRANT PROBLEM: A DISCUSSION AND REVIEW

By ELLSWORTH HUNTINGTON

During this strange period when war checks the stream of new citizens who usually swarm into the United States, we are thinking of immigration in a new light. On the one hand, we hear the insistent call of manufacturers for more laborers and of housekeepers for cheaper servants. On the other, the voice of the laborer is heard rejoicing because his wages are increasing and his standard of living is rising. Such conditions, however, are no more than the foam on a wave of temporary prosperity. They neither prove that immigration is desirable nor that it is undesirable. If we would discover the best immigration policy we must shut our ears to the deafening clamor of the immediate present and must listen to the record of what has actually happened in the past and see what it promises for the future when viewed in the light of science.

Three recent books¹ present an interesting epitome of the problem of race and immigration as it confronts the United States today. All three consciously or unconsciously emphasize racial traits. Although utterly different in method and purpose they agree in showing that our attitude not only toward the new immigrant but toward the people of diverse races already in our midst must ultimately be decided on the basis of expert judgment as to the respective parts played by heredity and environment. We have tried to make good citizens by means of religion, education, good government, sanitation, and philanthropy, not to mention other things. We have been sure that opportunity was all that is needed to make useful citizens out of almost any race. Of late, however, the students of eugenics have made us realize as never before that the main body of a stream can never be higher or purer than its source. If our immigrants are dull of mind and weak of will, our citizens will possess the same qualities. It is also beginning to dawn upon us that human energy is one of the main foundations of human character and that energy depends upon physical environment even more than upon social environment and training. Evidently the problem of immigration can never be solved until we add to our present efforts a full knowledge both of the part played by inheritance and of the degree to which inherited traits can be modified by physical environment. For the present, however, let us confine ourselves to heredity, since that is the phase of the problem which demands the most immediate and

¹ C. V. Roman: *American Civilization and the Negro: The Afro-American in Relation to National Progress*. F. A. Davis Co., Philadelphia, 1916.

Samuel Joseph: *Jewish Immigration to the United States from 1881 to 1910*. *Columbia Univ. Stud. in Hist., Econ., and Public Law*, Vol. 59, No. 4, 1914.

E. A. Ross: *The Old World in the New: The Significance of Past and Present Immigration to the American People*. Century Co., New York, 1914.

drastic action. Let us see to what conclusions we are led by a study of the three books under review.

The first book is "American Civilization and the Negro," by Doctor Roman. It deals with the first great immigration to America by people who are not largely Anglo-Teutonic in race. Perhaps we should not call the negroes immigrants, for their ancestors came to this country almost as early as those of any of us, but at any rate they still differ from the rest of us so much that they present a problem like that of more recent arrivals. In attempting to discuss Doctor Roman's book I find myself considerably embarrassed because the thing that interested me most in reading it was race psychology as represented by the author and reviewer. Perhaps the best way to give the reader a fair idea is frankly to relate my own experience. After reading forty or fifty pages I turned back to the title page and pondered on it. The book was interesting, and I sympathized deeply with its general purpose. Nevertheless, I was puzzled that an ex-President and Editor of the National Medical Association should drag in so many big words by the heels, only to explain them in footnotes, or in an ample glossary at the end. I was surprised by the abundant italics and innumerable quotations. The quotations were admirable in themselves, but I could not help feeling that they were overdone. It seemed almost as if the author had sorted his notes into groups and found a place for everything. This method and the author's strong tendency to digress and to philosophize aroused in my mind a certain impatience, which was intensified by the author's habit of setting up men of straw and battering them unmercifully. "Why fight with the windmills?" I asked. "No one denies that the white man's ancestors were savages, that many modern white men are beasts, or that millions of good negroes are far superior to millions of bad white people." Yet in spite of the impatience aroused by the method and style of this book every thoughtful person must feel strongly that Doctor Roman is fundamentally right in his plea that colored people should be judged as individuals and not as a race. We judge white men that way. Why not be equally fair to colored people?

After reading seventy pages with thoughts like these I suddenly discovered what I doubtless should have realized before, namely, that the National Medical Association is not the American Medical Association but a colored organization. My attitude changed at once. Instead of the impatience which had inclined me to drop the book or else to write a stinging review, I felt strong sympathy for the author's brave attempt to obtain for his race that justice which we white men still deny. The minor matters which had aroused my critical instincts no longer seemed important. My own change of heart on discovering that Doctor Roman was a negro was at first most disconcerting. It made me realize that although I am glad to meet a negro on the same terms as a white man of similar character and although I have great confidence in the future growth and achievements

of the colored race I am nevertheless racially biased. In spite of myself I judge the negro by a standard different from that which I apply to white men. The difference is that the standard is far more lenient for the colored race than for the white. A book which I should score severely if written by one of the leading white physicians of the country I am inclined to praise when written by a leading colored physician.

If Doctor Roman is right, this attitude is a grave injustice to the negro. The keynote of his book is that white men and colored men are alike. The white man may be ahead of the colored, but the difference is in degree, not in kind. Doctor Roman's own book suggests something of quite a different sort. Of course there are negroes who can write books like those of the white man. Yet there remains the subtle fact that even the best friends of the negro do not expect from him the same sort of work as from a white man. No matter how well he has been educated or how fully he has identified himself with white civilization we expect that even the scientific colored man will differ from the scientific white man much as an artist differs from an engineer. Each is superior in certain respects, but they are emphatically not alike. In a book about bridges by an artist we applaud things which we should frown upon if stated as the conclusions of an engineer. In other words, taking the colored race as a whole we expect—and I believe that the negro himself expects—that his work will be tinctured with an element of emotion which we do not look for in other races.

Doctor Roman's book is an emotional appeal, humorous, eloquent, and pathetic by turns, but it is never a scientific argument. He quotes the old saying that there are three kinds of lies—"lies, damned lies, and statistics." He avoids all three, but has a special abhorrence for the last. Therefore he is inconclusive. Yet he clearly sees the fundamental issues in the race problem. These may be summed up in two questions, biological and geographical. (1) Biologically, are there permanent racial differences which cannot be eradicated either by environment or by education and culture? Doctor Roman answers "No." (2) Geographically, does a race change its innate characteristics under the influence of a new geographical environment? Doctor Roman believes that in the new environment of the southern United States the Anglo-Teutonic white man on the one hand and the African negro on the other, even when they remain racially pure, are tending away from their ancestors toward an intermediate type resembling the American Indian. His own medical practice among colored people in Tennessee convinces him of a tendency away from the diseases that have been regarded as especially characteristic of the negro and toward those characteristic of the white man.

The Jew and the negro are strangely alike and strangely different. They are alike because both races have been subjected to the most cruel injustice and oppression. It is probably safe to say that during the century preced-

ing the emancipation of the slaves in America the Russian Jew suffered as much oppression as the negro. If we include the northern negroes there probably was scarcely more illiteracy among the colored people than among the Jews. During the half century since the emancipation of the negroes, however, their opportunities have been greater than those of the Russian Jews. The differences between the two races are much more marked than the resemblances. One race has come here to escape oppression, the other was brought to endure oppression; one is a race acutely proud of its supposed biological differences from other races and eager to emphasize them, while the other tries to appear as like the European races as possible. The Jew herds in cities, while the negro works on the farm; the Jew takes pride in assertiveness, while the negro may well take pride in his power to make merry in spite of hardships.

Because of this strong racial contrast it is interesting to compare Doctor Joseph's book on "Jewish Immigration to the United States" with Doctor Roman's book. Each is a book by a member of a highly specialized race in which he attempts to show what his race has done and how it is related to American civilization. Each is the kind of book that one would expect from an able member of the respective races.

Doctor Joseph's book is crammed with statistics and facts. It contains scarcely a statement that the most ardent critic would question, and everything is treated with absolute logic. It is the book of a member of a race which is sure of itself and its achievements and which feels no need of appealing to the rest of mankind when once it is given the chance which America affords. Nevertheless, one does not read this book with the interest that one has in Doctor Roman's work. There is nothing to cause a smile, to arouse an emotion, or to stimulate new investigation. The book first takes up the recent history of Russia, Rumania, and Austria in relation to the Jews. It shows how recent progress has aroused the non-Jewish population to the point where they have begun to be competitors with the Jews as skilled artisans and merchants. This has combined with fanaticism to cause anti-Jewish activities which have been relatively mild in Austria, but have taken the form of extremely repressive laws in the two other countries, and even of *pogroms* in Russia. The severity of the anti-Semitic activity is closely reflected in the number of Jews who come to America. Under persecution not only does the number of Jewish immigrants greatly increase, but the proportion of women and children increases still more. This proportion is at all times larger than among other races, which shows that the Jews come here to settle permanently. Abundant statistics in the text and long tables at the end of the book show the exact condition of the Jewish immigrants, their occupations, and their destination. The proportion of "skilled" laborers is larger than in any other important group of immigrants. A third of all who come are tailors, who usually settle in New York.

Doctor Joseph's book brings the Jews to us, as it were, but it offers no light on the serious question of whether the Jews are going to become part and parcel of the American people, or whether they are going to remain aloof and thus constitute a problem.

After reading the books of Doctor Roman and Doctor Joseph one cannot but wonder how extensively we are still introducing into our country elements which in spite of the new environment will retain their old characteristics as tenaciously as do the negroes and the Jews. Professor Ross in his interesting book on "The Old World in the New" attempts to answer this question. In the character of his book and in his racial inheritance, which is Anglo-Scotch-Irish-American, he stands between the two other authors. His book deals freely with statistics, but it also strengthens its hold on the reader by humor and emotion. It arouses opposition, as may be judged from the fact that both Doctor Roman and Doctor Joseph question some of its statements, but it is also highly suggestive and leads the reader to think and investigate for himself. It is so interesting that it should be widely read. One by one it takes up the different immigrant races and briefly and cleverly characterizes each. It lays strong emphasis upon the value of heredity and points out that the descendants of the early Puritans, Huguenots, Scotch-Irish, Quakers, and others who came with high purposes have done far more than their share in contributing the people who today by ideals and by power of concentration are leading the country. The way in which the more recent immigrant types are described may be illustrated by the Irishman. Statistics show that he is more apt than others to become a pauper, but to offset this he stands close to the top in the virtues of morality and family loyalty. His sins are apt to be those of kindness. That is why he is a political boss. He really wants to help "the boys," and when one of them once gets a job he cannot bear to turn him out. In a large factory this quality of friendliness is apt to make him the superintendent or foreman, while the German is much more likely to be the scientific expert, and the American of the older stock the financial head and the determiner of policy. The Scandinavians are pictured as in some ways the antithesis of the Irish. After Bridget has worked in the family five years and goes away to set up a home of her own, she comes around occasionally to ask after the "childther," but Frieda takes the money that she has carefully saved, and is never heard of again.

In this pleasant vein Professor Ross gives a picture of one race after another. One feels that the pictures are perhaps too impressionistic, but they are certainly suggestive. The author feels keenly the deterioration in the type of immigrants who are coming to us. The immigrants of today come from less competent classes than those of a generation ago. Doctor Joseph also brings this out, although he shows that it is less true of the Jews than of most races. Professor Ross believes that no greater danger besets our country than our present plan of practically unrestricted

immigration. We apply a few tests for health, but for the infinitely more important matter of mental and moral fitness we apply no tests whatever.

The three books here reviewed epitomize our immigrant problem. They show that it is utter folly to attempt to determine upon an immigration policy without the most careful study of the laws of heredity. It answers no purpose to say that we do not believe in heredity; it merely shows lack of familiarity with scientific investigations. As Doctor Davenport has well said we all believe in heredity. We prove it every time that we buy a packet of seeds marked *double* petunia, *scarlet* sweet peas, or *yellow* bantam corn. The fact that we buy these seeds proves that we have such confidence in heredity that we know that the special characteristics named outside the package will appear months later in our gardens. Few, if any, biologists deny that man is subject to the same laws of heredity as are animals, and that the mind is as much influenced by inheritance as is the body.

In spite of the agreement of biologists as to the reality and importance of mental as well as physical differences among the races of men, we are scarcely able as yet to define exactly what qualities belong to each race. Hence it is doubtful whether we show wisdom in excluding some races and admitting others. We are thereby doing the very thing that Doctor Roman justly arraigns us for. We are accepting the idea that certain races are inferior to, or at least are so inherently different from ourselves that it is better that they should not live among us, but we are overlooking the fact that the differences between individuals of the same race are enormously greater than those between races. Our immigration laws are as inadequate as if we believed that a family of stupid peasants from eastern Europe may in a few years develop into people of the caliber of the settlers at Plymouth. Can our country stand the strain of such an immigration policy? Do we know whither it is leading us? As yet we have scarcely begun to collect and analyze the vast body of statistics that are needed for an intelligent understanding of the biological and geographical questions involved in immigration. If the books here reviewed prove anything, they prove that our first step should be a stringent and effective regulation of immigration so that for ten or twenty years we may be sure that we are admitting none except those whose inherent capacities make them fit to share our citizenship. Such a policy would at least keep us out of danger. It would give an opportunity for some well-equipped and permanent agency to begin a far-reaching study of the mental and moral characteristics with which various types of immigrants are permanently endowed by heredity and of the changes which occur in immigrants under a new environment.